

Message Text

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15

ACTION ARA-20

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 5261

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PN

SUBJ: STUDENTS STRIKE AT NATIONAL INSTITUTE

SUMMARY: A STUDENT STRIKE--POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME FOR BOTH THE GOP AND U S -- HAS DEVELOPED AT PANAMA CITY'S NATIONAL INSTITUTE, THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL LOCATED ACROSS 4TH OF JULY AVENUE FROM THE CANAL ZONE. END SUMMARY.

1. WHILE AT THIS POINT ONLY A PEACEFUL WALKOUT, A POTENTIALLY TROUBLESOME STUDENT STRIKE HAS DEVELOPED AT THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE (IN) PANAMA CITY'S LARGEST PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL, AND TRADITIONALLY THE PLACE WHERE PANAMA'S LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN EDUCATED. REPORTEDLY PROMPTED BY STUDENT DISSATISFACTION OVER THE SHABBY STATE OF REPAIRS AT THE SCHOOL, HIGH PRICES IN THE CAFETERIA, THE HIGH RATE OF FAILURES--SAID TO BE NEAR FIFTY PERCENT--AND OVERCROWDED CONDITIONS, THE STRIKE HAS BEEN CONFINED UP TO NOW TO THE IN ITSELF. ALTHOUGH LITTLE IS KNOWN AT THIS JUNCTURE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S POSSIBLE RECEPTIVITY TO THE STUDENT'S GRIEVANCES, THE FACT THAT THE STRIKE IS UNDERWAY HAS BEEN KEPT OUT OF THE MEDIA AND THERE ARE REPORTS THAT

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THE GOP IS TAKING A HARD LINE WITH REGARD TO OPEN

EXPRESSIONS OF DISCONTENT. ACCORDING TO THIS INFORMATION, THE NATIONAL GUARD HAS LET IT BE KNOWN THAT ANY DEMONSTRATORS VENTURING OUTSIDE THE IN CAMPUS WOULD BE ARRESTED AND THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION HAS TOLD A PARENT'S REPRESENTATIVE THAT THE INSTITUTE WOULD BE CLOSED UNLESS THINGS CALM DOWN. WHILE THE SITUATION IS STILL EVOLVING, THERE APPEARS TO BE NO EARLY RESOLUTION IN SIGHT AND AN EMBASSY SOURCE HAS TOLD US THE AFFAIR HAS TAKEN AN OPEN ANTI-GOP OVERTONES.

2. COMMENT: THE GOP HAS SHOWN LITTLE TOLERANCE IN THE PAST FOR STUDENT ACTIVITIES WHICH MIGHT EMBARRASS THE "REVOLUTION", AND THIS INSTANCE WILL LIKELY BE NO EXCEPTION. THE PREDOMINATELY RADICAL, NATIONALIST AND LEFTIST ORIENTATIONS OF THE INSTITUTE'S STUDENT LEADERSHIP, LESS DISCIPLINED THAN ITS UNIVERSITY LEVEL COUNTERPART, NEVERTHELESS GIVE THE SITUATION AN ADDITIONAL ELEMENT OF UNCERTAINTY. LOCATED AS IT IS DIRECTLY ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE CANAL ZONE, ANY ERUPTION OF VIOLENCE AT THE SCHOOL COULD WELL SPILL OVER INTO OR BE DIRECTED AT THE ZONE. SAYRE

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